

Lincoln, directed by Steven Spielberg is a 2012 film about the Civil War era and the end of Abraham Lincoln's 1st term and the duration of his short 2nd term. In the movie, the Lincoln administration faces the challenges of the status of slavery as the Civil War comes to its final conclusion. Lincoln's cabinet is skeptical that the Administration will be able to get the required 2/3rd majority needed in the House of Representatives in order to pass the 13th Amendment, which would legally abolish slavery. In the film, according to A.O. Scott of the New York Times', in his review he states that, director Steven Spielberg is attempting to show "Lincoln isn't an abstracted, infallible idea, but rather a deeply conflicted, often lonely leader simply trying to do the right thing."¹ This portrayal of Abraham Lincoln is consistent with the events and works of scholarship done that show that Abraham Lincoln had experienced a chaotic childhood, and adulthood with him losing 2 children to disease as well as the mental toil he experienced from leading the Union during the Civil War, where it wasn't clear until the very end whether he would be successful or not. The reason why the conversation about the 13th Amendment is enhanced by the discussion of Lincoln's character is because it presents an encompassing theme of perseverance.

Perseverance was needed by many lawmakers because of the timing, arguments and persuasion that was needed to gather support for the 13th Amendment and the legislation that led up to it. For example, in the movie at the 27th minute time mark came, Lincoln's discussion of the legality of the Emancipation Proclamation passed in 1863, which is the legislation that freed slaves in the South whom were called contraband; under the law, that came from Confederate territory that was occupied by Union soldiers. In the monologue, Lincoln describes how he had to loosely interpret the laws of property and the conduct of warfare in order to give himself the legal authority to claim that property, in this case the enslaved, were free game to free by the Union as a means of requisitioning necessary

1 A. O., Scott "A President Engaged in a Great Civil War" Review of *Lincoln*, *New York Times*, (November 8, 2012). <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/09/movies/lincoln-by-steven-spielberg-stars-daniel-day-lewis.html>.

supplies and other material needed to conduct the war.² The concern Abraham Lincoln and his cabinet had over the legality of the freeing of the slaves was very valid, because the Supreme Court's decisions regarding the Western territories and other matters concerning African Americans such as the Dred Scott Case in 1857, which restricted citizenship from people of African American descent.

Although, the audience has the hindsight of understanding that Abraham Lincoln and the Republicans were able to get the 13th amendment passed, it is shown that this wasn't the Republican's first inclination. According to Kenneth Turan of The Los Angeles Times in his review of *Lincoln*, "one of the surprises and the pleasures of 'Lincoln' is a portrait of the president as a man gifted at reconciling irreconcilable points of view, someone who wouldn't hesitate to play both ends."³ This is an important observation because based on the events of the movie, with the South coming to the table to negotiate peace, had the Radical Republicans and their allies not lobbied hard for their legislation, it may well have taken much longer for the start of Civil Rights to be legally cemented in the Constitution, since the Civil War was a major pressure for change to the laws of the nation.⁴ After personal appeals to reluctant lawmakers and continual lobbying from the Republicans, the 13th Amendment is passed by a margin of two votes in the movie.⁵ Despite the passage of the 13th Amendment to the Constitution being far from the end of the fight for Civil Rights for all people in the United States, it ended a system of oppression that had affected many peoples' lives.

In conclusion, for although this portrayal is not completely accurate in its portrayal of the events leading up to the passage of the 13th Amendment, it captures a spirit of the American people of trying to reunite their country and to expand liberty to more of their population, than ever before.

2 Tony Kushner, and Doris Goodwin. *Lincoln*. Directed by Steven Spielberg. 2012. United States: Dreamworks Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Participant Media, DVD. 27:38

3 Kenneth, Turan. "Review: Steven Spielberg's 'Lincoln' a Towering Achievement" Review of *Lincoln*, *Los Angeles Times*, Accessed on (June 27, 2021). <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-lincoln-review-20121109-story.html>.

4 Ibid 46:03

5 Ibid 2:01:57

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